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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates a program designed to increase the reading ability of disadvantaged elementary school students in New York City. Three hundred twenty-five students, grades three through six, from three Harlem elementary schools were enrolled in the program on the basis of being at least a year below their expected reading levels. The educational method employed was based on the programmed instructional techniques developed by B.F. Skinner. The individualized programed instruction was monitored by reading specialists and educational assistants. The evaluation objective was to determine whether the students' reading grades would increase significantly from the pre-test to the post-test. The New York City Reading Achievement pre and post-test scores were assessed to evaluate reading improvement. The reading achievement results indicated that in all three schools the evaluation objective was achieved by the fifth grade. In two of the three schools, the fourth grade achieved the objective. The two sixth grades in the program failed to achieve the objectives. The only third grade in the program showed no positive results. (Author/JP)

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EVALUATION REPORT

Function Number: 20-03414

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORTER CORPS.

SCHOOL YEAR 1975 - 1976.

LESTER J. SCHWARTZ

An Evaluation of Selected New York City Umbrella Programs funded under a Special Grant of the New York State Legislature performed for the Board of Education of the City of New York for the 1975-1976 school year

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CHAPTER I: THE PROGRAM

The Student Progress Reporter Corps., a component of the School Community Interaction Umbrella Program, was designed to increase significantly the reading ability of disadvantaged elementary school students. The program was conducted in three school in District 3, Harlem; P.S. 207, P.S. 208, and P.S. 180 and completed its third year of operation under the New York City Board of Education. Previously, it had functioned for two years as an independent community program. The educational method employed was based on the programmed instructional techniques developed by B.F. Skinner.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The curriculum used in the program, the Company Accountability In Reading Achievement (CARA), was a graded series of cassettes, worksheets, and readers based on a comprehensive set of behavioral reading objectives. The program was individualized through students working at carrels and controlling their own rate of progress through the use of separate cassette recorders and the immediate feedback of stripes appearing in the correct response boxes of the worksheets. Each student maintained a folder containing all of his worksheets and a Progress Plotter that is a grid on which the students day-to-day progress was recorded. Diagnosis and periodic evaluation were accomplished by means of tests which enabled teachers to place students at any point in the program and to determine when each behavioral objective had

been achieved. Reinforcement of learning, a cardinal principle of programmed instruction, was achieved by the immediate feedback of the answer sheets, the earning of daily competence points, and certificates of merit which were awarded at the completion of each of eight levels of achievement. Another important reinforcement was the daily check made by the staff of each student's work. This not only afforded social reinforcement but allowed teachers to monitor each child's progress. Although the CARA curriculum was the heart of the program, supplimentary reading materials were used by the teachers to provide greater variety and stimulation of interest.

The program augmented the reading instruction that students received in their regular classes. In two schools, P.S. 207 and P.S. 208, students worked in the CARA reading rooms daily for periods of about 50 minutes. In P.S. 180 students were seen three to five times a week depending on their need as established by the teacher and the principal.

THE STUDENTS

Three hundred twenty five students were enrolled in the program during the school year as follows:

P. S. 208 - 120 in grades 3-6

P. S. 207 - 120 in grades 4-6

P. S. 180 - 85 in grades 2-5

Most of the students selected for the program were at least a year and a half below their expected reading level; however, 22 students in P.S. 207 and nine students in P.S. 180 had pre-

test scores less than one year below grade level. Based on the test results, students were selected by school administrators and program staff.

PROGRAM STAFF

The staff consisted of a program coordinator, who is a licensed teacher, three teachers (one at each school), and four educational assistants (one at P.S. 207, one at P.S. 180 and two at P.S. 208). The teacher and the educational assistants, at P.S. 180 and the teacher and one of the educational assistants at P.S. 208 were paid by tax levy funds; the other program personnel were supported through the program budget. The coordinator taught one period a day at P.S. 207 and covered for absent personnel at the other schools as well as carrying out his regular coordinating duties. The teachers were all experienced reading teachers. The educational assistants were initially trained by the coordinator and then supervised by the teachers to whom they were assigned. The teachers and the educational assistants saw five classes a day in periods of about 50 minutes each.

DURATION

In P.S. 207 and 208, student selection was made in September 1975 and the program began full operation by the end of that month. In P.S. 180 the program began operating at the very start of the school year. In all three schools the program continued to the end of the school year in June 1976.

CHAPTER II: EVALUATIVE PROCEDURES

EVALUATION OBJECTIVE I

To determine whether as a result of participation in the Student Progress Reporter Corps Program, the reading grade of the students will show a statistically significant difference between the real post test score and the anticipated post test score.

SUBJECTS

The subjects were to consist of all the participants in the program. Of the 325 students who were enrolled in the program, 189 (58 per cent) received pre and post tests and constituted the sample. Table 1 accounts for the 136 students who were not in the sample.

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF STUDENTS TESTED AND NOT TESTED (N=325)

	N	%
Received pre and post tests	189	58.1
Second graders (P.S. 180)*	21	6.5
Absent for post test	30	9.2
No recorded pre test score	33	10.2
Discharged during school year	52	16.0
TOTAL	325	100.0

*N.Y. City Reading Achievement Test is not administered in first grade.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The pre test scores were derived from the results of the New York City Reading Achivement Test that was administered in the

Spring of 1975. The post test scores were the results of the New York City Reading Achievement Test that was administered in March 1976. The appropriate forms were used at each grade level. The tests were administered by the teachers of the students' regular classes. The results were recorded by the CARA teachers and submitted by them to the evaluator.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The pre and post test results were analyzed by the "Real (treatment) Post Test vs. Anticipated (without treatment) Post Test" design. The data was analyzed by school and by grade level in each school.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

The results would be more valid and more data would have been available had a pre test been administered in September. As it was, there was a lapse of over four months between the pre test and the start of the program. The evaluator was not retained until February 1976 and it was then too late to administer pre tests. A second limitation on the procedure was that pre and post test scores were available for only five third grade students in P.S. 208; consequently only the results of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades were analyzed in that school.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVE II

To determine whether the program, as actually carried out, will coincide with the program as described in the proposal and any subsequent adenda/modifications.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The evaluation made four visits to each school between February 6, 1976 and May 14, 1976 and observed classes in all grades serviced. He also interviewed program staff, students, and school administrators.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS

The evaluation objective related to reading was; to determine whether, as a result of participation in the Student Progress Reporter Corps. Program, the reading grade of the students will show a statistically significant difference between the real post test score and the anticipated post test score. Tables 2, 3, and 4 summarize the results of the Historical Regression Analyses by grade in each school.

TABLE 2

Historical Regression Analysis of N.Y.C. Reading Achievement Test Results for P.S. 180 (N=41)

Grade	N	Pre Test Mean	Predicted Post Test Mean	Actual Post Test Mean	t
3	10	2.11	2.66	2.70	.279 N.S.
4	13	2.68	3.28	3.62	1.880*
5	18	3.51	4.16	4.60	1.763*
All Grades	41	2.90	3.51	3.83	2.400*

*Significant at the .05 level

The evaluation objective was achieved in grades 4 and 5 in P.S. 180. In these grades the mean actual post test scores surpassed

the mean predicted scores, based on past school achievement, by about three and a half and four and a half months respectively. In grade three, there was no significant difference found between the predicted and the actual mean post test scores.

TABLE 3

Historical Regression Analysis of N.Y.C. Reading Achievement Test Results for P.S. 207M (N=96)

Grade	N	Pre Test Mean	Predicted Post Test Mean	Actual Post Test Mean	t
4	40	2.74	3.36	3.34	- .221 N.S.
5	32	3.69	4.39	5.30	5.516**
6	24	4.55	5.29	5.35	.331 N.S.
All Grades	96	3.51	4.19	4.50	3.320**

**Significant at the .01 level.

The evaluation objective was achieved only in grade 5 in P.S. 207. In this class, the actual mean reading score of the children surpassed the predicted score by nine months while in grades 4 and 6 there was no significant difference between the predicted and actual mean post test scores.

TABLE 4

Historical Regression Analysis of N.Y.C. Reading Achievement Test Results for P.S. 208M (N=52)

Grade	N	Pre Test Mean	Predicted Post Test Mean	Actual Post Test Mean	t
4	8	2.16	2.59	2.99	2.778*
5	17	2.75	3.21	4.30	4.273**
6	27	3.42	3.88	3.97	.529 N.S.
All Grades	52	3.01	3.46	3.93	3.431**

*Significant at the .05 level.
**Significant at the .01 level.

The evaluation objective was achieved in P.S. 208 in grades 4 and 5. The mean actual post test scores exceeded the predicted post test scores by three months and almost eleven months respectively. In the sixth grade there was no significant difference between the mean predicted and actual post test scores.

In all three schools the evaluation objective was achieved by the fifth grade. In two of the three schools, the fourth grade achieved the objective. The two sixth grades in the program failed to achieve the objective. The only third grade in the program also showed no positive results.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

This section is based on site visits, interviews with program staff and building principals and informal inquiries with students.

FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND MATERIALS

The facilities in all three schools were good educational environments of adequate size and pleasant appearance. The carrels (24 in P.S. 207, 32 in P.S. 208 and 28 in P.S. 180) were well maintained and comfortable. The audio equipment was basically well designed and sturdy but a repair problem was existent for much of the year. The New Century Company which supplied all the CARA hardward and software responded slowly to repair calls. Consequently, machines and headsets and, therefore, carrels were inoperative for long periods of time. This was particularly unfortunate since repairs often only required

soldering of loose wires. A materials problem also existed. The teachers reported that most of the materials did not arrive until the Spring. Fortunately, materials were left over from the past year and the staff managed to get by but with one serious problem. The chemically treated correct answer spaces on many of the worksheets had deteriorated so that students could see which were the correct response boxes. This presented the staff with the added chore of constant inspection. The staff did an excellent job in the organization, storage, and easy retrieval by students of the great variety of materials required by the system; a task needing a good deal of time and care. The materials and repair situation, however, prompted the teacher in P.S. 208 to say that she would not return to the program next year unless the condition was corrected.

THE PROGRAM IN OPERATION

The program is staffed by teachers who are experienced and are specialists in remedial reading. They are conscientious, concerned and feel the CARA system is of value. The educational assistants are also performing their duties well. They appear to be competent and interact well with the students. The smooth staff functioning is probably due, in part, to its relative stability over the years. Only one new educational assistant had been replaced in the past year. Two teachers have been with the program since its inception and the third joined at the start of the second year.

In P.S. 180, the school and program relationship was exemplary.

Planning and student selection was done cooperatively. The principal was very supportive and consulted with the program staff regularly.

In P.S. 208, the school-program relationship did not appear to be quite as effortless but there were no serious problems in this respect. The principal was new and was still in the relation building process. In P.S. 207 an acrimonious situation existed between the principal and the program coordinator. This resulted in frictions and morale problems. This situation appears to have lessened the learning environment of the program in this school. Generally, the students seemed to react favorably to the program. There was no systematic attempt made to determine student opinions, but the evaluator asked at least twenty students in each school, "If you had your choice, would you rather come to this class or stay in your regular class during this period." Of the sixty some odd students so queried only five said they would rather not attend. The behavior of the children was also indicative of their positive attitudes toward the program. There was almost no disruptive behavior seen and students, generally attended to their work with seriousness.

One other student related problem was noted. In P.S. 208 there were students in the reading room for the day who came from classes with absent teachers. Although reasonably well

behaved, they distracted from the business of the class. Apparently it is school policy to distribute such pupils throughout the school when three or less teachers are absent rather than hire substitutes.

DISCREPANCIES FROM THE PROPOSAL

a. The proposal called for students in grades three through six. In P.S. 180 second graders were serviced. This was because it is a K-5 school and there was room for the second graders.

b. The proposal stipulated that participants be considerably below grade level in reading. In P.S. 207 there were 22 students who were only five months or less below grade level at the start of the year. In all other respects the program coincided with the proposal description.

RECOMMENDATION FROM LAST EVALUATION

The recommendations of last year's evaluation were:

1. That the reading teachers meet several times during the year to discuss problems.
   One such meeting was held. The coordinator reported that scheduling meetings was very difficult because of teaching schedules.
2. That the company supplying the materials develop homework materials for student use.
   The coordinator reported that there were insufficient funds to purchase such materials.
3. That more relevent biographical materials be used to increase motivation.

Again, the coordinator reported that funds were not sufficient to purchase the additional materials.

4. That the publisher of the curriculum materials be encouraged to improve the quality of the line drawings in the materials.

This recommendation was conveyed to the publisher by the coordinator.

CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The fifth grade students in all three schools achieved significantly higher mean post test scores than expected. In two of the schools the fourth grade students also achieved significantly higher mean post test scores than expected. Neither of the two sixth grades nor the one third grade that participated in the program met the evaluation objective.

2. Generally, the facilities were good but materials did not arrive in the schools until the Spring of the year. Equipment repair was slow which often kept needed equipment inoperative.

3. A small sample of students indicated positive feelings about the program.

4. In one school the program coordinator and the school administration differed sharply about the program which seemed to detract from a smooth operation. The program-school relationships in the other two schools were good to excellent.

5. The program staff was experienced, conscientious and functioned well under the conditions cited above.

6. The program generally conformed to the proposal except that in one school about a sixth of the students selected for the program were close to grade level in reading at the time of selection.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The program had variable effectiveness. It was successful in the fifth grade and good results were obtained in the fourth grade.

The program seemed ineffective in the third and sixth grades, regardless of the schools. No conclusions can be offered about this variability without further research.

2. A major delivery of supply and a repair problem existed which requires correction.

3. In P.S. 207 the program coordinator and school administrator should resolve their differences if the program is to attain maximum effectiveness there.

4. The program has demonstrated merit and should be even more effective if the noted problems were corrected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The program should concentrate its efforts in the fourth and fifth grades. At the same time efforts should be made to determine how the program can be made more effective

for younger and older students.

2. The system for the ordering and delivery of materials should be improved to insure much faster delivery.

3. A small amount should be budgeted to permit minor repairs of equipment to be made in the locality of the schools.

4. If the principal of P.S. 207 and the program coordinator can not resolve their differences than the program should be moved to another site.

5. The program has demonstrated merit and should be recycled.